TRUMBULL COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Dennis Watkins, Prosecutor

Repeat Violent Offenders newsletter

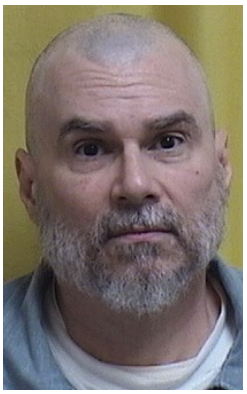
PAROLE UPDATE: Sept. 2, 2026

Police killer Fred Joseph denied parole

Once told prison guard that if released, he would shoot more cops;

After decades behind bars, Joseph increases pace of rules violations

Jenna Maze, coordinator of the Trumbull County Prosecutor's Victim Witness Division, learned from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction this week that 60-year-old police killer Fred Joseph Jr. has been denied parole and his next parole hearing will be scheduled in six years.



Joseph, who is serving a 30-year-to-life sentence for the December 1982 shooting death of Niles police officer John Utlak, was denied parole by the Ohio State Parole Board after a hearing in late July.

Joseph and his accomplice Randy Fellows were tried and found guilty before two different juries and Joseph was sentenced by late Common Pleas Judge David McLain in June 1983 after being prosecuted by Trumbull County Prosecutor Dennis Watkins and staff attorneys.

John Utlak and his partner Bob Ludt were investigating drug activity among the teen population of Niles. On the evening of Dec. 8, 1982, Utlak told his partner that he was going to meet some informants, Fred Joseph Jr., then age 17 and Randy Fellows, 18, in the parking lot of the Gibralter Steel Corp. in Mineral Ridge. Unknown to Officer Utlak, Joseph and Fellows had planned to kill and rob the officer and flee the state of Ohio. Upon arriving at the parking lot, Fellows remained in the car while Joseph got out to speak to Utlak. As Joseph approached the officer, he pulled out a gun and shot Utlak at close range in the right side of the head. Joseph and Fellows then robbed Utlak of $400, a watch, his service revolver, a two-way radio and shotgun. Fellows and Joseph then fled the state in Fellows' mother's stolen car, heading west on the interstate. The dead body of Utlak was found the next morning by plant workers. Shortly after midnight on Dec. 11, 1982, Joseph was arrested at a traffic stop in Wyoming, while Fellows was arrested later at a Cheyenne, Wyoming, motel.

In his letter opposing parole, Watkins stated Joseph does not qualify for parole because of the heinousness of his crime, his future dangerousness, and his record of not learning from

past mistakes as evidenced by his poor in-prison behavioral record which included "constant spewing of hateful epithets and violence to others no matter who you are."

The letter detailed a conversation between then prison guard, Doug Sollitto, and Fred Joseph which occurred around 1994 at Trumbull Correctional Institution in which Joseph acknowledged personally shooting officer Utlak and "when I get out, I'm going to sit across from the Niles Police Department and shoot the first five cops that come out the door"

Joseph's prison infraction record includes a recent history of 27 incidents and 46 violations of breaking prison rules and verbally abusing correction officers. (See attached June 15, 2026, letter which details prison records including recent increase of bad behavior – 46 reported infractions in the last five years.)

Watkins said he was pleased with the parole board's decision and happy for Joseph's surviving family, including his sister Joanne Robbins, and his partner Bob Ludt. Joanne also appreciated the Parole Board personally calling her to inform her of their decision.

"This office views him (Joseph) as "a safety hazard," a man who has, can and will spew out hatred and violence without a moment's notice even while in prison," Watkins said. "Fred Joseph does not qualify to get in the return-to-society recycling bin of inmates... he needs imprisonment until he dies. Because Joseph was 17 years old when he killed Officer Utlak, this actual killer missed a death penalty prosecution by days."

Joseph, who is incarcerated at Toledo Correctional Institution, will have his next parole hearing in May 2032.

Members of the public may submit comments about the potential parole of Fred Joseph Jr. Comments can be made through the ODRC website: https://drc.ohio.gov/systems-and-services/1-parole/parole-board-hearing-input For more information, contact Guy Vogrin, investigator / public information officer, Trumbull County Prosecutor's Office, 330-675-2485.